

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 9

February 6, 1996, 4:12 p.m.
Page S-907 Temp. Record

FARM BILL/Cloture (on the Substitute Amendment)

SUBJECT: Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996 . . . S. 1541. Lott motion to close debate on the Craig (for Leahy/Lugar) substitute amendment No. 3184.

ACTION: CLOTURE MOTION REJECTED, 59-34

SYNOPSIS: As introduced, S. 1541, the Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996, will make sweeping changes to the Nation's farm policies. Farm programs will be reformed to allow farmers to plant what they want when they want, acreage reduction programs will be eliminated, and spending on farm programs will be capped so that subsidy payments will decline as part of a 7-year transition to full market-oriented farming.

The Craig (for Leahy/Lugar) substitute amendment would make the following changes:

- mandatory funding for crop-oriented conservation cost-sharing would be increased by \$100 million per year;
- the Agriculture Department would offer to "buy out" the acreage base of producers who farm frequently-flooded areas;
- a limited "conservation farm option" would be offered, in which price and income supports would be converted to environmentally conditioned "green payments";
- producers would be allowed to seek permanent wetlands easements;
- innovative range management techniques developed in the Southwest would be encouraged;
- farmers would be able to serve on State technical committees;
- the Food Stamp Program and a few other nutrition programs would be reauthorized;
- the Northeast Dairy Compact would be authorized;
- the Conservation Reserve Program would be reauthorized through 2002; new entrants into the program would be allowed;
- milk marketing orders could be used to collect funds for farmer environmental programs; and
- a non-profit foundation would be created to promote conservation.

On January 31, 1996, Senator Lott sent to the desk, for himself and others, a motion to close debate on the Craig for Leahy/Lugar amendment.

(See other side)

YEAS (59)			NAYS (34)		NOT VOTING (7)	
Republicans (48 or 100%)	Democrats (11 or 24%)		Republicans (0 or 0%)	Democrats (34 or 76%)	Republicans (5)	Democrats (2)
Abraham	Hatfield	Biden		Akaka	Gramm ⁻²	Nunn ⁻²
Ashcroft	Helms	Bradley		Baucus	Lott ⁻²	Reid ⁻²
Bennett	Hutchison	Breaux		Bingaman	McCain ⁻²	
Bond	Inhofe	Graham		Boxer	Murkowski ⁻²	
Brown	Jeffords	Johnston		Bryan	Smith ⁻²	
Burns	Kassebaum	Kerry		Bumpers		
Campbell	Kempthorne	Lautenberg		Byrd		
Chafee	Kyl	Leahy		Conrad		
Coats	Lugar	Moseley-Braun		Daschle		
Cochran	Mack	Pell		Dodd		
Cohen	McConnell	Robb		Dorgan		
Coverdell	Nickles			Exon		
Craig	Pressler			Feingold		
D'Amato	Roth			Feinstein		
DeWine	Santorum			Ford		
Dole	Shelby			Glenn		
Domenici	Simpson			Harkin		
Faircloth	Snowe					
Frist	Specter					
Gorton	Stevens					
Grams	Thomas					
Grassley	Thompson					
Gregg	Thurmond					
Hatch	Warner					

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

NOTE: A three-fifths majority (60) vote of the Senate is required to invoke cloture. See also vote No. 7.

Those favoring the motion to invoke cloture contended:

The Chairman and ranking Member of the Agriculture Committee have reached agreement on a compromise substitute amendment to this bill. We understand that pressure is still being brought to bear on Democratic Senators to oppose invoking cloture, so this vote still may not carry, but in the end this pressure will not win out. Politics aside, we are confident that on the merits most Senators, both Democrats and Republicans, are now generally supportive of this bill.

The changes that are in this substitute amendment were proposed by Democrats, and were either accepted by Republicans in the spirit of compromise or because they were actually proposals with which Republicans agreed. An example of the latter is a proposal to allow farmers to enter acreage into the Wetlands Reserve Program permanently. That option would increase farmers' flexibility, and is thus an option that is favored by Republicans. Also, Republicans are supportive of the proposal to encourage innovative range management techniques in the Southwest.

Changes that were made in the spirit of compromise include the reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program and other food welfare programs without any reforms, and greatly increased spending on conservation programs. Republicans, and we believe a substantial number of Democrats, are opposed to allowing a continuation of the status quo in food welfare programs. Reforms are urgently needed, and a bipartisan consensus on the nature of those reforms was reached in the Senate last year on the welfare reform bill. Instead of reenacting current law, the logical course would be to enact the welfare reform bill changes which the vast majority of Senators so recently agreed are warranted.

Other changes in the amendment would be made in the area of conservation. Overall, those changes would greatly reduce the savings in this bill by increasing spending on conservation programs, including mandatory spending programs. Conservation programs are certainly meritorious--improving water quality and limiting erosion improve farmer productivity while at the same time they improve the environment--but it is questionable that the best way to promote conservation is by spending more money on more Federal programs. It is especially questionable when all of that extra spending will be deficit spending due to the lack of offsets.

These changes could have been agreed to earlier if Democrats had been more willing to negotiate before now. Unfortunately, when this bill was drafted last year as part of the reconciliation package, Democrats refused to negotiate on its details. President Clinton, for his part, offered criticisms of Republican proposals, but did not exercise any leadership by making constructive suggestions of his own.

Finally, though, due to the efforts of the ranking Member of the Agriculture Committee, it appears that some Senate Democrats are willing to work in a spirit of bipartisanship. This change is very encouraging. We are fairly confident that this bill will soon pass the Senate, that the House will act on a bill, and that a compromise that is acceptable to both Houses and the President will be reached. If we are wrong, the alternative will be to rely on the antiquated existing law. If so, we think that farmers will likely tire of waiting for politicians in Washington to act. They will refuse to enroll in the farm program. Instead of a transition to a free market, our stalemate may produce it immediately. Worse things could happen.

The United States' basic farm policy was developed in the Great Depression to meet Depression-era realities using 1930's farming methods. It is time to bring it into the modern world. America's farmers chafe under the controls and limits of the central-planning mentality of this policy--they do not want to be limited and protected by the Federal Government. Instead, they want to be set free to compete, and they are confident that as the best farmers in the world they will succeed. We are confident they will succeed as well, and urge those of our colleagues who trust in the ability of America's farmers to join us in voting to invoke cloture.

Those opposing the motion to invoke cloture contended:

The Leahy/Lugar substitute amendment definitely would make substantial improvements to the bill, but the core thrust of this bill, which is to phase out farm programs altogether, remains. We disagree with that thrust. For 60 years this Nation's policy of providing a safety net for farmers in bad times has worked well. America has the cheapest, highest quality, most environmentally sensitive agricultural products in the world. The radical abandonment of this policy is being rammed down our throats. Instead of passing a farm bill last year, our Republican colleagues have waited to the first part of 1996 to even begin debate on their proposal. They do not want us to have a chance to debate it--they correctly point out that farmers already are having to make their decisions on such matters as seed purchases without any idea of what Federal policies for this year will finally emerge. They therefore tell us that we have to hurry up and pass their bill without debate so that farmers will not be left in limbo. We will not accept this legislative blackmail. The Farm Bill should be returned to Committee, and a true compromise bill should be worked out there. It should then come to the Senate floor and be subject to the lengthy, serious debate which has been the norm on previous farm bills. Only 2 percent of Americans may be farmers, but the food production industry accounts for 13 percent of America's Gross Domestic Product, and agricultural exports generate enormous yearly surpluses. We should not be so cavalier in our treatment of this important industry. The motion to close debate should be defeated.